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Mayor's Committee Honors Contributions to People with Disabilities

A clothing retailer, the head of a racquetball federation and a young man who triumphed over a traumatic brain injury are among the winners of annual awards from the City of Raleigh Mayor's Committee for Persons with Disabilities.

The awards honor those who have had a significant impact on behalf of persons with disabilities. The Mayor's Committee for Persons with Disabilities recognized the winners at its annual banquet Wednesday, Oct. 19, at the Raleigh Convention Center.

Lisa Grillo, assistant superintendent for Special Education Services in the Wake County Public School System, was guest speaker at the banquet. She described the education of children with disabilities as one of the most important social justice issues of our time.

The Mayor's Committee for Persons with Disabilities is a group of volunteers appointed by the mayor of Raleigh to help people with disabilities participate in the economic and social life of the community. The committee promotes employment of people with disabilities and sponsors activities benefiting them and their families.

The 2011 award winners are:

- Employer of the Year (small business) -- The Produce Box, 1053 E. Whitaker Mill Road, which helps its employees with disabilities gain confidence in themselves;
- Employer of the Year (medium business) -- Retailer T.J.Maxx, 6647 Falls of Neuse Road, which provides maximum opportunity for employees with disabilities to be successful while maintaining their dignity;
- Employer of the Year (large business) -- Food Lion, 3926 Western Boulevard, which supports a program that allows students with disabilities to gain work experience and earn school credits;
- Supervisor of the Year -- Bruce Davis, food and beverage manager of the Hilton Garden Inn, who sets high expectations for employees with disabilities and provides the tools for them to succeed;

- Excellence in Print Media -- Chris Fitzsimon, director of N.C. Policy Watch, who has advocated for improved services for people with disabilities;
- Excellence in Recreation -- Steven Harper, head of the Military Racquetball Federation, which uses racquetball as a rehabilitation tool for those wounded in military service; and,
- James E. Meekins Award -- Brian Buker, who rebuilt his life after a traumatic brain injury in a 2006 automobile accident and has worked to inspire and assist others with disabilities.

The Mayor's Committee for Persons with Disabilities also recognized outgoing Mayor Charles Meeker for his commitment to serving people with disabilities throughout Raleigh. James Benton, chair of the Mayor's Committee, praised the mayor for supporting initiatives, such as an annual scholarship and a transit program for those with disabilities.

The City of Raleigh Community Services Department provides staff support for the Mayor's Committee for Persons with Disabilities. To learn more about the committee or its annual awards, contact Cathey Ector in the Community Services Department at 996-6100 or email cathey.ector@raleighnc.gov